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UNCLAS AMMAN 001302

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON MIDDLE EAST, U.S.  
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

#### Summary

-- The lead story in all papers today, February 23, is Monday's suicide bombing in Jerusalem that killed eight people and wounded numerous others. Another major story highlights U.S. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld's visit to Kuwait and his remarks about Al-Qa'eda operating in Iraq.

#### Editorial Commentary on Middle East

-- "The wall trial and the bus bombing: who is lurking for whom?"

Semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (02/23) editorializes: "It is time to put a stop to these operations that have no political benefit and only contribute to increasing the siege against and the killing of Palestinians, as well as increasing the international silence with regard to Israel's crimes. Today's hearing on the wall would have been an opportunity to expose Israeli measures, but these operations only waste such opportunities."

#### Editorial Commentary on U.S. Presidential Elections

-- "John Kerry in the face of George Bush"

Columnist Yaqoub Jaber writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (02/23): "It is nearly certain that John Kerry will win the nomination of the Democratic Party to compete against George Bush in the U.S. presidential elections this year. The question is whether Kerry can defeat Bush, who is supported by the right-wing forces who consider him the most capable to implement their plans and serve their objectives that can only be described as extremely hostile. George Bush's popularity is in a state of continuous decline and John Kerry, if he manages his elections battle intelligently and focuses on his opponent's mistakes inside and outside the United States, can beat the president who lied and cheated and brought enmity to the United States from all the people of the world. The other question is what is the level of change that Kerry would bring about to the U.S. policy on Iraq and the Palestinian issue, which is what we are concerned about as Arabs.. It is known that Kerry voted in favor of the war on Iraq when he was in Congress, but he says that he did so based on the lies that were told by the Bush administration with regard to the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. As for the Middle East and the Palestinian Israeli struggle, Kerry has so far avoided talking about it, as if he does not want to stir a battle that he is unprepared yet to wage.. Most likely he will have to talk about the Middle East issue, probably in a manner that would please Israel and the Jewish Lobby and not hurt the feelings of the Arab constituents, once his nomination is confirmed. We already know that there has been no American president since Eisenhower who managed to twist Israel's arm and make it do something that it did not want to do. Having said that however, we notice that Democrat presidents were closer than their Republican counterparts to attempts to resolve the struggle on bases that steer away from Israel's expansionist aspirations and measures that reflect neither morality nor logic.. We must not pin any hopes on this or that president. Yet, the world certainly needs a different president, who would probably be more open-minded and more understanding that the current president."

GNEHM